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Drivers detoured

Closure of Hwy. 58 into Welland could
span four months.
Page 12

Fun on the canal

Flyboarding could be coming to a local
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Page 14

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Trapped in a 10-metre hole

DAN DASH/
QMI AGENCY NAGARA
Firefighters had to
carry equipment
across about one
kilometre of deep
snow to reach the
victim. See Page 2
for the full story.

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UPFRONT

SAFETY

Man rescued by firefighters, paramedics was geocaching

DAN DAKIN
QMI Agency Niagara

Dan O'Hara and his family have found 7,335 geocaches over the years.

But the hunt for No. 7,336 is one the 47-year-old Port Colborne man will never forget.

He ended up getting trapped in a hole about 10 metres deep and had to be rescued by firefighters and paramedics Sunday afternoon.

"I didn't know how deep the hole was ... all I remember is hitting the bottom," O'Hara said.

Geocaching involves hiking and using GPS coordinates to find hidden boxes.

O'Hara, his wife and their son were on the hunt Sunday for a geocache in Thorold described as being only accessible "during the winter months when the fourth Welland Canal has been drained for its yearly maintenance."

As it turns out, the geocache is illegal to access year-round.

Trying to find it cost O'Hara a trespassing charge — and nearly his life, too.

While walking atop the wall of an old lock from the Third Welland Canal — an area normally under water when the canal is flooded — O'Hara fell into a drainage access hole and dropped about 10 metres to the ice below.

It took a 3 1/4-hour joint rescue operation involving more than a dozen firefighters from Thorold and St. Catharines and Niagara paramedics to get him out of the hole.

Remarkably, he was uninjured in the fall and was able to make the kilometre-long trek back to the road on his own once he was rescued. O'Hara was looked over at the scene by paramedics, then released.

He said when he first fell in the hole, he was wedged near the top but his legs slipped as he tried to get out.

He climbed to a small shovel the family was carrying along as he could, but eventually had to let go.

"I did back up, gave myself a quick check to make sure everything was still intact and nothing really hurt but as I knew I was going to be OK. It was just a matter of getting out



DAN DAKIN/QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Thorold Fire Department Capt. David Thomson helps two paramedics and a Port Colborne man climb up an embankment. The man, dressed in black, fell into a deep hole in an old Welland Canal lock wall Sunday.

of that hole," he said.

Making the rescue difficult was the amount of snow on the ground. Firefighters and paramedics had to carry large equipment to the scene from their trucks at the end of Seaway Haulage Rd.

They had to walk along a snow-covered access road, through a section of trees, down an embankment, across a narrow section of frozen canal, back up the other side and then through thick brush to get to the hole O'Hara was wedged inside.

There were concerns that more holes could be hidden by snow, so the rescuers carefully followed the tracks made by the first person on scene, Niagara Regional Police Const. Patrick Boal, and O'Hara's son, who led Boal back to the hole from the road.

"We weren't really sure what we were getting into ... it's the old canal area and we have lots of holes," said Thorold fire department captain David Thomson at the scene.

To pull the man out, the St. Catharines fire department's high-angle rescue team set up a pulley tripod over the hole, which Boal described as being about the size of a sewer grate.

"(O'Hara) was fine and talking. He was just covered by snow," Boal said.

"We were talking to him and we threw him a blanket to keep warm."

O'Hara said he was feeling alright while he waited in the hole to be rescued.

"I was a little concerned with the amount of people they were sending to get me out," he said.

"All they really needed to do

was send a rope down and a harness and they could have gotten me out pretty quick, but I guess they didn't know the situation and they had to plan for the worst."

An Orange air ambulance was initially called in and circled the area looking for a landing site, but was sent back after paramedics confirmed O'Hara's injuries didn't appear serious.

A Thorold firefighter was taken to hospital with a knee injury, but it also wasn't serious, Thomson said.

Once the ordeal was over, Boal said O'Hara would face trespassing charges at the request of St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corp., which owns the land where the incident occurred.

Alvina Ghirardi, the seaway's manager of maintenance plan-

ning and logistics, issued a statement Sunday afternoon saying "this is a very remote location on seaway property, which is a no-trespassing area."

"As a reminder, the public should not trespass onto seaway lands. Areas such as the old canal and weirs and water-courses can pose hazardous conditions, especially in winter when they are snow-covered and slippery ... It's not a place you want to be walking or playing around and again, access is strictly forbidden."

O'Hara said he accepted the trespassing charge, but said he didn't see any warning signs to keep out.

"Geocaches are supposed to be on public property, or if they're on private property you're supposed to have permission to place them there," he said.

WHAT THEY WERE HUNTING FOR

The O'Hara family was trying to locate a geocache titled Return to the Island. Below is the description of the cache from the geocaching.com website

"The location of my only active remaining cache. I have loved this area so much, I thought it deserved another venture and another smiley. Please note, this cache can only be legally accessed during the winter months when the Fourth Welland Canal has been drained for its yearly maintenance."

"Any other time of year is prohibited and those who do not respect this limitation, may be subject to penalty of law."

"With that being said, the cache location is unique, as this lock, Lock 21 of the Third Welland Canal, is the only lock whose gates are still in place. To the east of Ground Zero, you will be treated to a view of the only lock which is hidden underwater for the majority of the year. This lock has been beautifully preserved from the elements for over 80 years."

"When approaching this cache, please be careful as there are holes in the ground and it may be slippery during the frigid temperatures, and it is a long drop to the water below."

"Please take a few moments to reflect on this area and how busy it must have been during the heyday of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Also, feel free to post any pics that you may take of the area."

"We didn't see any no trespassing signs along the way and no fences we climbed over or through."

— With files from Don Fraser

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LOCAL NEWS

■ **MUSIC:** Country superstar band surprises Fitch Street kids with donation of 35 instruments

Lady Antebellum a hit with Welland students

GREG FURMINGER
QMI Agency Niagara

Lady Antebellum has hit a high note with a Welland elementary school.

One of the biggest acts in country music these days, the Tennessee-based band donated 35 ukuleles to Fitch Street School while in Niagara Falls in February to perform two shows at Niagara Fallsview Casino Resort.

And it all started with a Grade 6 letter-writing campaign for financial aid, its intended target being an audience no further than St. Catharines.

"It's a fabulous story," said Cindy Paskey, executive director at Niagara Education Foundation.

The foundation is a nonprofit charity that raised money to provide school programs and services where government funding is not available, including for such things as winter boots and clothing, medications and co-op education placement equipment needs.

When it put out a call for grant requests last October, Fitch Street students took to writing formal requests.

Led by Grade 6 teacher Suzanne Anderson, students spent several hours composing and editing their letters, seeking \$1,500 in aid to help buy new ukuleles. Tying in with curriculum, they focused on words and phrases that would hopefully stir a chord with foundation recipients whose home is the District School Board of Niagara office.

When students later received a rejection letter, "It was a little disappointing," said Anderson, who teaches music and has been at the school for the past two years.

Still, the students politely responded, again in writing, this time with a thank you to express appreciation that their request had at least been considered.

"It really worked out well. They enjoyed the task," said Anderson — who now knows just how well.

Not long after Niagara's education foundation declined the grant — simply because there had been so many applications — the fall — Paskey received an e-mail from Universal Music



Country music's Lady Antebellum donated 35 ukuleles to Fitch Street School in Welland. Pictured from left are teacher Tracy Singer, the band's Charles Kelley, teacher Lisa Teal, Lady A's Hillary Scott, teacher Suzanne Anderson, the band's Dave Haywood and teacher Katie Wheeler.

Group. In November the music publisher was searching on behalf of Lady Antebellum to assist a Niagara Falls area school at the time of the band's Feb. 16 and 17 shows.

"I hopped on it right away," said Paskey.

"The band was looking to donate instruments to a school where they would have a big impact."

Remembering all the letters her office had received, she knew right away that Fitch Street "made a natural fit" with the request.

Copies of some of the letters received by Niagara Education Foundation — ended up forwarded to the band.

"Clea wrote about the over-used ukuleles students now use having to be borrowed by and shared with other schools. 'We would master a song and then, just like a ghost they would vanish.'"

Wrote Andrew: "When we

borrow ukuleles we never know what condition they are in. They usually have broken strings and the ukulele can literally be broken."

They pulled on the band's heartstrings.

Paskey found herself "sworn to secrecy" about the surprise gift that as a result would be coming to Fitch Street School via Lady Antebellum and Universal and with the assistance of Little Kids Rock, a U.S.-based charity that supports school music programs south of the border and which put the package of 35 ukuleles together.

Before their concert at the Fallsview casino on Feb. 17, Lady A as the band is affectionately known to fans — and now even more affectionately as 'Lady Eh?' for its kind gesture to the Canadian school — recorded a message for Fitch Street students. Charles Kelley, Hillary Scott and Dave Haywood appear in the video showed to

the school during an assembly the next morning.

"We hope you have a great time with these — practice, practice, practice," said Scott in the video.

Added Kelley, after thanking students for their letters, and displaying a big thank you card with the school name and "Mrs. Anderson's Grade 6 Class" on the front (the secret slipped out to a few people): "We know you guys deserve these instruments so much ... and we want you to continue to love music, and hopefully you guys can come see us at a show some time."

Concluded Scott: "That's for continuing to inspire us."

Lady A posted a photo of the exchange on its Facebook page with a similar message: "Had a great time in Ontario yesterday with the Fitch Street Elementary School! Hope you guys like your new instruments! Now get to practicing!"

One of the gifted instruments

is signed by the band and will remain on display in the school's showcase cabinet.

"I was very excited for the kids," said Anderson. "We teach them if you work hard at something, you get rewarded."

"It turned out well for them in the end."

The donation to Fitch Street School is an extension of Lady Antebellum's campaign launched last September, 70:17, tied to the release of their 747 album, which granted a wish to seven fans over a period of seven days.

"Since the release of their album they've been doing these 70:17 campaigns where they pop up and surprise people all over the country," said Hayley Simmons, of the band's public relations firm The Greenroom. "So there's no plan to do this exact same thing again, but the 70:17 theme (it) will definitely continue to happen in other forms."

Messages posted to Lady Antebellum's Facebook page

"As a parent at Fitch St. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. We have some of the best staff on earth and I am so happy to have music still alive and well in our awesome school."

— Brenda Mathews

"So fantastic! I was floored when my daughter yesterday and told me the story — thank you so much! You've taught our children kindness and generosity!"

— Blaine Dube Gulla

"Nice work with the letters. Grade 6s and Mrs. Anderson! Kids at Fitch need more music & arts to help them grow and be better people, and the ukuleles (sp?) will be awesome. Thanks too to Lady Antebellum for helping out by supporting the arts at Fitch Street, from this teacher/musician!"

— Dean Purdie

"As a mother of one of the kids that wrote the letters for the instruments thank you so very much Lady Antebellum. My son came home excited to be tuning them today."

— Nicole Goodfellow

Paskey understands the Welland school will be the only Canadian site benefiting.

A request for interviews with band members could not be accommodated.

Lady Antebellum also founded The LadyAID Fund of The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee. It's a philanthropic effort, its website said, to bring awareness to and generate support for the plight of children locally, nationally and globally who cannot otherwise help themselves. The campaign was primarily for children's hospitals in the United States and Canada.

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Finding strength in our weakness

GOOD ABRAHAM
Port Colborne Baptist Church

Time has passed so quickly in my life that I am overwhelmed by how little there is left compared to how much there is that has passed.

My body is not what it used to be. I remember, as a teen, playing hockey, soccer, football, volleyball and jogging a few miles every day with nothing more than tiredness to show for it. Believe me, those days are gone.

Now I make the effort to

walk and exercise enough just to keep healthy and allow my joints to remain workable.

My mother used to say, jokingly, that she was getting so wrinkled she would need to go to the dry cleaners for a "pressing."

Growing awareness of my weakening body — but, thankfully, not yet my mind — makes me very conscious of the shortness, fragility and weakness of my life.

Recently, I rediscovered a woman, who is my age. In her 18th year she was weeks away from her freshman year in college and was

planning her life of activity and accomplishments. All this came crashing in and was turned upside down, when through a diving accident she became a quadriplegic, confined to a wheelchair.

Her name is Joni Eareckson Tada. Her battle with God and the unbearably difficult, physical and emotional struggle, is well documented in the biography titled by her name, *Joni*.

A few years back in an interview with Larry King she shared honestly and openly about the day-to-day struggles portraying

someone who has allowed her weakness to be compensated for and empowered by God's strengthening power.

In her God-empowered weakness, she is a wife to Ken, an artist — drawing and painting with her mouth, a songwriter-soloist and the co-founder of Joni and Friends International.

Joni has a syndicated radio spot, writes books, preaches, speaks to large crowds about disabilities, and when able shares her life and encouragement with individuals struggling like herself. Joni often quotes, and must relive every day,

the statement made by the Apostle Paul, when he struggled with his unchangeable weakness.

"Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time He said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.'" (2 Corinthians 12:9 NLT)

Joni has lived and continues to live this battle every day, but she has learned to give thanks, draw on God's enabling power and lives for the hope of a new body in a new creation. Until that day of liberation from weakness, she attempts to turn

her weakness into service for others so that she does not live in self-pity and self defeat — and in so doing she raises up God for all to see His wonderful love and power in her weakness.

If the urge to complain about your weaknesses, limitations and pain rises up, turn to the words of Jesus quoted by the apostle, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness," then, go out and find someone in need and give yourself to them in what they need to be. That is power in weakness.

Shipwrecks — Carina

SKIP GILLHAM
For QMI Agency Niagara

Carina was fresh from the Austin & Pickersill shipyard in Sunderland, England, when it began coming to the Great Lakes in 1969.

The 141-metre-long carrier, built of the popular SD-14 design, had been launched on Feb. 25, 1969, and completed on April 3.

Carina operated under the flag of Liberia until it was re-registered in Greece as *Aloussa* in 1978. By 1986, the ship was now under a fourth name of *Hymetus* and carrying Lebanese registry when it got into trouble in the Far East.

On Nov. 16, 1986, *Hymetus* encountered heavy weather carrying a cargo of steel on a long voyage from Roumes, Bulgaria, to Shanghai, China. The hull cracked in the twisting and pounding seas and the ship began to flood. The crew were ordered to abandon their vessel about 290 kilometres south-southeast of the island of Hong Kong. *Hymetus* sank the next day in the South China Sea and it appears that there were no casualties.



Carina is pictured in Montreal in September 1969.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPT. JOHN LON

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■ TORONTO2015

Pan Am Games torch relay to roll through Niagara

DAN DAKIN
QMI Agency/Niagara

The Pan Am Games Torch Relay will roll through Niagara in June.

Organizers of the Toronto2015 Pan Am and ParaPan Am Games have announced details of the 41-day torch run that will cover

more than 20,000 kilometres.

The relay will start in Toronto on May 30 and after being carried across the country by 3,000 torch bearers, will finish at the Pan Am Games opening ceremony back in Toronto on July 10.

The torch will come to Niagara on Day 21 of the tour on June 20, when it visits Market Square and the Community Wellness Complex in Welland, then heads to Market Square and Lake-side Park in St. Catharines, and finally to Queen Victoria Park in Niagara Falls.

The Welland International Flat-

water Centre will host the canoe and kayak sprint events at the Pan Am Games and Henley Island in St. Catharines will host the rowing events.

While the torch relay will stick largely to Ontario cities, the tour also includes stops in Richmond, B.C., Calgary, Winnipeg, Gatineau, Que., Montreal and Halifax.

The names of those selected to be torchbearers for the tour will be released starting in March.

The ParaPan Am games will have its own torch relay that will run from Aug. 3 to 7 that will cover more than 700 km and include more than 150 torch bearers.

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Seinfeld to perform at Meridian Centre

Iconic standup comic and TV star Jerry Seinfeld is coming to the Meridian Centre in downtown St. Catharines.

The centre confirmed Sunday that Seinfeld — known for his long-running television show — will perform Friday, June 5 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets for the show will go on sale Friday starting at 10 a.m. They will be available at the Meridian Centre box office, online at www.ticketmaster.ca or charge by phone at 1-855-985-5000.

The centre offered anyone who is a Meridian Centre Facebook fan or Twitter follower a special VIP pre-sale code released for a two-day pre-sale that started Tuesday morning.

Search @MeridianCtre or like the centre on Facebook at www.facebook.com/MeridianCtre.

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COURT

Man sentenced to seven years for death of Port Colborne woman

BILL SAWCHUK
QMI Agency Niagara

A Port Colborne man was sentenced to seven years in prison for death of Courtney Tourand in the Ontario Court of Justice last Friday.

Harry Gleason Leavere, 45, struck a plea deal to manslaughter in November. He was originally charged with second-degree murder and offering indignity to a body.

"Seven years for the taking of a life doesn't seem right, but in the end it doesn't really make a difference," Lindsay Tourand, the victim's sister, said Monday. "I thought the judge was fair with what he said. He quoted from our victim impact statements and it felt like he took what we said into consideration."

"One thing I would like to do is thank the homicide unit and the Crown attorney. They were good through the whole

thing."

Courtney Tourand, 31, of Port Colborne was found dead in Leavere's apartment at 262 West St. in Port Colborne shortly after 3 a.m. on Aug. 27, 2013. Niagara Regional Police at the time said she had been dead for three days to a week. Leavere was taken into custody in Hamilton about 12 hours after Tourand was found.

Leavere has been in custody since his arrest. He was giving credit for almost two-half-half years of pre-trial custody at a one to one-and-half basis.

Tourand was the common-law partner of Derek Reid. The couple met when they were students at E.L. Crossley Secondary School in Pelham. They had been together for 18 years and moved to their Port Colborne home in 2011.

According to an agreed to statement of facts, the Tour-

rand and Leavere were at Leavere's apartment drinking and listening to music when they got into an argument that turned physical, initiated by Tourand. The two wrestled and Leavere fell on top of her. He put his arm to her neck in an attempt to restrain her. She went unconscious, then he carried her to the couch.

When Leavere woke in the morning, he discovered Tourand dead.

In a victim impact statement given Jan. 28, eldest sister Erin Raffley said, "I will never get to hug Courtney again, and I will never really know what happened to her." Liz Chumick, Tourand's aunt, told court in her victim impact statement she still struggles with the fact her niece's blood was found in Leavere's room of Leavere's apartment, that he tried to wipe up the evidence, that Tourand

had four fractured ribs.

"I've seen the pictures of what you did to a 'friend,'" she said, before noting how Tourand's body was found stuffed into garbage bags.

"You ran, leaving her to rot while her family went on searching and searching for her."

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ORIS FORWIMMER/QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

The sisters of Courtney Tourand — from left, Shannon Bird, Lindsay Tourand and Erin Raffley — hold the Port Colborne woman's photo following sentencing arguments for Harry Gleason Leavere, who has pleaded guilty to manslaughter in Courtney's 2013 death.



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■ NIAGARA REGION: Politicians to be paid \$29,184

Councillors vote for 2.93% raise

ROB HOULE
QMI Agency Niagara

It's official, Niagara Regional politicians are getting a 2.93% raise retroactive to December.

Councillors voted 17-11 last week to a raise that will see them earn \$29,184 for the 12-month period beginning December 2014, up from \$28,353.

Regional Chair Alan Casslin will see his pay raised to \$120,768 from \$117,330.

A third of the salaries are tax-free.

For St. Catharines Coun. Andy Petrowski, it was a question of fairness.

"The fact is, regional councillors are being paid 25% less than their counterparts," Petrowski said. "Now I've always said we probably can't afford paying automatically as well as the rest of Ontario, but I don't think 2.93% against 25% puts us anywhere close to a situation where we need to put under a microscope whether our councillors are being compensated fairly. And this is all about fairness, and I believe it's fair in order to continue to attract people who want to enter public service, and there's a lot of challenges around that."

"You could say we do it because we want to serve the public fine, but there are a lot of us, including myself, who are self-employed or work in the private sector who make financial sacrifices."

St. Catharines Coun. Kelly Edgar said it is not fair for councillors to take such a pay hike when asking others to take less.

"When we're asking people to pull in their horns and to take less... I think it's only appropriate that we take less as well," Edgar said. "As far as serving the community, I'm just happy to be here."

Referencing a chart provided by the region's head of human resources showing comparable pay with other municipalities, Pelham Mayor Dave Augustyn said Niagara regional councillors are not paid 25% less than their provincial peers.

"We're on par, we're not 25% less, maybe if you

include the entire comparative group, but those that are part-time councillors... we're pretty much on par," Augustyn said.

The salary hikes are based on a methodology established by a council remuneration citizens review committee that was approved in 2004. The methodology bases councilor and chair pay increases on the 12-month average core consumer price index and the Conference Board of Canada's annual policy line change for non-unionized employees for Ontario.

Augustyn re-introduced an amendment first presented at the corporate services committee by Grimsby Coun. Tony Quirk to set raises to the percentage given to the region's non-union workers, which this year would be 2%.

Welland Mayor Frank Campion said he was supportive of the amendment because it would take the decision out of councillors' hands.

"I find it extremely offensive, almost vulgar, to be voting on your own salary," Campion said. "I find it very, very difficult. It's something we shouldn't do and I believe the public would find it quite offensive. We have to take that out of our hands."

Grimsby Mayor Bob Bentley said the reason the citizens' committee was formed was to remove councillors from the equation when it comes to setting raises.

"I'm one of those fellas who's been here for a long, long time," Bentley said. "I remember why that committee was struck. It was so we didn't have to make a decision on our own. I don't like changing rules as we go along because of the flavour of the day."

St. Catharines Coun. Bruce Timms said councillors should follow established policy and not use the issue of raises as "a political tool."

Augustyn's amendment was voted down and councillors voted 17-11 in favour of the 2.93% raise.

rob.houle@sumedia.ca

Port police detachment to remain open

Port Colborne will have a fully-functioning police detachment until at least 2019.

At last Thursday's Niagara Regional Police services board meeting, a commitment was made to keep 6 District, at 501 Fielden Ave., open for at least another four years.

The motion was brought

forward by board member David Barrick, who also serves as the Port Colborne's regional councilor.

"The police services board, City of Port Colborne, Township of Wainfleet and Niagara regional council all supported this as part of the public consultation process and during the development of the police long-term

accommodation plan," Barrick said.

"The board has reaffirmed its decision to maintain a dedicated police presence within the City of Port Colborne."

Board chair Bob Gale said he is "extremely pleased" with the decision to end discussions about closure of the facility.

"I am a strong believer in value for the taxpayers but it is important for the (police) service to maintain a strong presence in the heart of the communities it serves," the Niagara Falls councillor said.

"I believe the board can find cost savings on other items as part of the budget process."

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LOCAL NEWS

■ NIAGARA REGION

Councillors opt not to have integrity commissioner

ROB HOULE
QMI Agency Niagara
Some thought he was
a waste of money. Others

thought he was good value. But at the end of the day, Niagara Region no longer had an integrity commissioner to provide oversight of councillors.

After lengthy debate last week, regional councillors voted 17-11 to do away with the services of an integrity commissioner.

Niagara Falls Coun. Bob Gale said he felt the services of an integrity commissioner were a waste of money long before he was elected in Octo-

ber. He said the integrity commissioner was nothing more than a tool of attack against St. Catharines Coun. Andy Petrowski.

"We know why this integrity commissioner was here, let's not lie about it. But I'm proud to sit beside Coun. Petrowski. I find him very smart. I find he's got everything going in the way of politics. He's nurtured me along ... But he wears his passion on his sleeve. He's very loud, as you can tell. The way he talks to some of the staff, at times I disagree with. But if I went into a battle, I'd want him beside me."

primary purpose should be communicating to the public it is a method for the citizens of Niagara to hold us to account. It is an inexpensive and proper way for us to actually hold us to a higher standard."

The integrity commissioner billed the region approximately \$24,000 in 2014.

Niagara-on-the-Lake Coun. Gary Burroughs, who was chair of the last term of council, said he was privy to complaints other than those filed against Petrowski.

"I had some experience, having been chair during the time of the integrity commissioner ... we had two who did other things than deal with Coun. Petrowski — other councillors. Issues were resolved with staff, and nobody beard about them. And nobody should hear about them. I think we're taking it all very casually that, Oh, it's all about Andy. No it isn't."

Burroughs went on to read from a column by Brock University professor David Siegel, who wrote it would be "awkward for councillors to investigate and sanction their colleagues. And it would be inappropriate for staff members to investigate their political masters."

Burroughs said having an integrity commissioner improved relations between staff and council.

"I think the system is right, I think it needs tweaking," Burroughs said.

Port Colborne Coun. David Barrick said he was against hiring an integrity commissioner from the onset.

"My suggestion at the time when this came about was the integrity commissioner role would be used as a political weapon," Barrick said. "It would be used as a witch hunt. Certain people would be targeted, and quite frankly, it's proven itself to be true, at least in my view."

For Niagara Falls Coun. Bart Maves it's simple.

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LOCAL NEWS

■ EDUCATION: Aquaponics project to aid greenhouse industry

College students spending break helping Dominicans

CATHY MCCABE
For QMI Agency Niagara

Sixteen Niagara College students are in the Dominican Republic for their reading week, in the hope of helping the local greenhouse industry.

Bill MacDonald, who is leading the students on their trip, is a professor at the college's school of environmental and horticultural studies. He said the students will be demonstrating aquaponics to the Dominican people.

Aquaponics is a combination of aquaculture and hydroponics. Aquaculture or fish farming is the breeding and harvesting of aquatic animals in controlled conditions. In a hydroponic system, plants are grown in water instead of soil. Using a solar-powered pump, water is pumped from the fish tank to the plants. It is filtered through the plants and then the clean water is drawn back down to the fish.

"Aquaponics started in the tropics. It started at the University of the Virgin Islands,

"We're giving them the tools to succeed. We're not showing them what to do. We're helping them along."

Derek Beatty, a renewable energies technician student

so it's something suited, very much, to tropical climates," MacDonald said.

"Long term, I'd love to get a really big aquaponics system going down there."

The plants that can be grown in this system include greens such as lettuce, basil and Swiss chard. He said normally tilapia fish are used in aquaponics, but they are "going to have to see what sort of fish will work there."

While in the Dominican,

students are also teaching English as a second language. Recreation and leisure students are going to be organizing some sporting activities.

MacDonald said that Cathy Falt, one of the students who went to the Dominican Republic with the college in October, is holding Spanish lessons for the students attending the trip.

Growers Greenhouse Supplies has donated a greenhouse to the college that the students will build in the Dominican. They will be installing anchors for the 77-square-metre structure during this trip and others will be returning in October to finish the project.

Christine Zmud, a first-year horticulture technician student, is on this trip for the first time.

"I've always wanted to not go as a tourist, but to go see the countryside as somebody who is going to help," she said. "I've always wanted to teach English in a foreign country, so that is going to be interesting."

Derek Beatty, a renewable energies technician student, went to the Dominican Republic last October with the college.

"It's cool to see how (the trip) has grown. Last time we were doing man-pow-



SUPPLIED

Environmental and horticultural studies professor Bill MacDonald is pictured with students who are attending Niagara College's aid trip to the Dominican Republic.

ered pumps to help the irrigation and the greenhouses. We showed them a project, how to make these man-powered pumps and they looked at it and said, 'OK, we can use it for pumping water up the side of the mountain,'" he said.

"We're giving them the tools to succeed. We're not showing them what to do. We're helping them along," Beatty said the trip "was

absolutely life-changing last time."

"Getting the cultural experience is valuable enough, let alone the technical experience."

A second group of students is in Ecuador to participate in

a community build project in the Amazon Rainforest over reading week. It is being led by Jim Norgate, program coordinator of police foundations studies at the college.

Both groups will return March 8.



SUPPLIED

Environmental and horticultural studies professor Bill MacDonald shows students Cathy Falt, MacKenzie Rowat and Jake Hordyk a model of the aquaponics system that will be built in the Dominican Republic. Falt, Rowat and Hordyk, who went on a similar trip last October, are helping the students prepare.

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■ BICENTENNARY: War of 1812 celebration 'has been a great challenge'



JOHN LAW / QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Niagara 1812 Legacy Council CEO Brian Merrett and communications manager Katie Farr wrapped things up last week. The council's website became an archive on Friday for the past three years' worth of events.

1812 legacy council comes to an end

JOHN LAW
QMI Agency Niagara

That's a wrap on the War of 1812's bicentennial.

After six years of planning and three years of events, the Niagara 1812 Legacy Council closed its doors Feb. 27 at its Thorold office. It relaunched its website as an archival site with photos, videos and media coverage from the past three years.

"This has been a great challenge," says the council's chief executive officer Brian Merrett. "A bit sad to see it come to the end ... but feeling satisfied."

"I can't believe how fast it went," adds communications officer Katie Farr. "All the years are kind of blurring into each other when you look back at the pictures and places we went."

The council's last official event was the Treaty of Ghent Commemoration in Niagara-on-the-Lake Feb. 17. Although the peace treaty that ended the war was ratified by the British parliament in December of 1814, it took weeks until news reached the U.S., during which battles continued until the treaty was ratified by the U.S. Senate in February 1815.

The legacy council marked the treaty's 200th anniversary with a procession from St. Mark's Anglican Church to the Court House on Queen St.

"It was the perfect way to end it," says Farr. "That was celebrating the peace."

It was the end of a three-year run which included dozens of events, huge re-enactments and a better cross-border understanding of what the war meant, Merrett says.

"We feel it was very successful by the things you can measure, like attendance," he says. "But we also think we were able to increase the awareness of the War of 1812, especially locally. They got a chance to understand how important Niagara was to the formation of Canada."

After the legacy council made its last formal presentation to Niagara Region council, the group's website became an online archive. Farr says there will be extensive coverage of events like the 2012 Battle of Queenston Heights re-enactment which attracted more than 15,000 people.

It could prove an invaluable asset when future generations celebrate the 300th anniversary of the war.

"Hopefully the Internet is still the same."

The legacy council also contributed material to a new TVCogo 10 special airing next month. *The War of 1812 — 1814 Bicentennial: Niagara's Legacy* will be shown March 15 at 9 p.m., March 16 at 8 p.m. and March 20 at 7 p.m.



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CONSTRUCTION: Heading north not as simple



MARYANNE FIRTH/QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Hwy. 58 is expected to be closed for four months while two bridges, including the overpass at Forks Rd. and a nearby bridge over CN and Trillium railway tracks, are replaced. The closure is expected to begin Monday.

Hwy. 58 closure to span 4 months

MARYANNE FIRTH
QMI Agency Niagara

Drivers who frequent Hwy. 58 between Welland and Port Colborne have had to find a new route for the next four months.

A portion of the highway, from Kleiner St. to Forks Rd., closed Monday and will remain closed until work to replace two bridges is complete.

Dufferin Construction will replace the aging overpass atop Forks Rd., as well as the overpass atop the CN and Trillium railway tracks about 100 metres north.

The Oakville-based company was contracted by the Ministry of Transportation for the project, which also includes the recently completed bridge work on Hwy. 140.

The total cost of the project, including work on both highways, is \$7.5 million.

"Demolition will happen and the two old structures will be completely replaced," project superintendent Robert Morarescu, of Dufferin Construction, said.

"It is an extensive project, but the bridges are small," he said, adding he's confident the work will be finished in four months or less.

The existing bridges are more than

40 years old. They are expected to have a 50-year service life once work is completed.

While one lane of traffic was able to be kept open during work on Hwy. 140, this is not possible on Hwy. 58, Morarescu said.

"The structures are a lot narrower and cannot accommodate one lane of traffic and one lane of construction."

MTO recommends drivers instead take Prince Charles Dr. to Townline Tunnel Rd. and then get on Hwy. 140 to head south.

Hwy. 58 will remain open from Hwy. 3 in Port Colborne to the access road to Forks Rd., Ministry of Transportation spokesperson Astrid Poel said. Local traffic only will also be permitted from Townline Tunnel Rd. to Kleiner St.

Signs had been in place in the affected areas for about two weeks warning of the coming closure, Morarescu said.

Dufferin Construction has been in contact with emergency personnel, including police, fire and EMS, in both Welland and Port Colborne to discuss the closure and available alternate routes, Morarescu said.

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IMPORT NEWS



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LOCAL NEWS

■ **POLITICS:** Headlines reshaped at southern-tier luncheon

Mayors put emphasis on teamwork

SARAH FERGUSON
QMI Agency Niagara

Niagara's municipalities must work together in order to achieve success, say the southern tier's mayors.

"This is an exciting time for Niagara because never before has there been such potential for our future," Fort Erie Mayor Wayne Redekop said Thursday during the Southern Tier Mayors' Luncheon at the Fort Erie Leisureplex banquet hall.

"The local municipalities understand that the success of any one of us is really dependent on the success of all of the other municipalities," he added.

Redekop, with mayors Dave Augustyn of Pelham, Frank Campion of Welland, Jim Diodati of Niagara Falls, April Jeffs of Wainfleet and John Maloney of Port Colborne came together to highlight important projects in their respective communities that will have a significant economic impact on Niagara in its entirety.

The event was hosted by Welland, Pelham, Port Colborne, Wainfleet, Greater Port Erie and Niagara Falls chambers of commerce.

In general — it was a recap of recent headlines.

Redekop noted three "potential game-changing developments" in the works for Fort Erie: the Canadian Motor Speedway, the revitalization of Miller's Creek Marina and the redevelopment of Fort Erie Race Track.

Augustyn spoke of the eastern expansion of Fonthill and the possibility of a new community cen-

tre and area facility.

Campion and Maloney both talked about municipalities offering financial incentives to attract new investment and development of employment lands.

Similarly, Jeffs spoke of small business and how its establishment in Wainfleet is important to Niagara's economy.

"We are a little spoke in the big wheel but we are still a spoke," she said.

Jeffs said the leaders of Niagara need to focus on being a resource and a strong support system for local business.

"From the lady who makes soaps in her basement, employing two close friends, to the granite countertop manufacturer employing 25 individuals who is on the cusp of expanding to 50 or more employees, how do we help them?" Jeffs asked.

"We create a prosperous environment, we let them know we are here, we are listening and we're willing to help. We will work to foster thriving region."

Diodati said he is focused on bringing the GO train to Niagara and enhancing tourism in the region.

"The GO Train will be the economic silver bullet for the Niagara region. It will have more impact than anything else we can do," Diodati said.

Cruel to attracting visitors, Diodati said GO will bring tourists who will want to stay in Niagara longer to explore its wineries, vineyards, its racetrack, beaches and more.

sarah.ferguson@sunmedia.ca



SARAH FERGUSON/QMI AGENCY

From left, Port Colborne Mayor John Maloney, Fort Erie Mayor Wayne Redekop, Niagara Falls Mayor Jim Diodati, Wainfleet Mayor April Jeffs, Welland Mayor Frank Campion and Pelham Mayor Dave Augustyn spoke about the future of the region during the Southern Tier Mayors' Luncheon Thursday at the Fort Erie Leisureplex banquet hall in Fort Erie.

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■ **WRCC:** Leasing opportunities being explored



DAN DAKIN/QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

In this file photo, Tyler Bagshaw, 17, performs a trick while riding a flyboard on the Welland River in Niagara Falls.

Welland could host FlyBoard Niagara

MARYANNE FIRTH
QMI Agency Niagara

Local adrenaline junkies could be in luck.

Welland Recreational Canal Corp. is in talks to bring FlyBoard Niagara to the Rose City.

Once located at the Greater Niagara Boating Club in Niagara Falls, the company — which has participants riding a waterjet-powered board into the air — is looking for a new home and believes a spot on the Welland Recreational Canal may be just the right fit.

WRCC executive director Stephen Fischer provided an update on talks with the company Saturday during a special board meeting.

The sport creates "very little noise, very little wake," he said, and has no power requirements as the board runs off a modified jet ski engine.

It would not interfere with the canal's rowing courses.

Two proposed locations are under review, directly behind city hall and at Merritt Island in the waterway across from the WRCC building.

Minimal equipment would be locked

up on site and the remaining items are taken to and from the location each day by FlyBoard staff, Fischer said.

The company also has its own liability insurance, he added.

The only requirement FlyBoard Niagara has is that a change room and washroom be available for customers.

It would be at council's discretion whether the city would allow use of its existing facilities, Fischer said. Those details, he added, could be worked into the lease agreement.

"I can't think of any reason why this wouldn't be an allowed use," he said, adding it would mean increased revenue for the city through the leasing opportunity.

It costs \$149 for 30 minutes on the board, though a local rate of \$100 for 30 minutes is also available, Fischer said. The company had 480 people use its services last year.

A report outlining the leasing options is being prepared and will be presented to Welland council at a later date.

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LOCAL NEWS

COMMUNITY

Project supports police and youth connections

ALLISON LANGLEY
QMI Agency Niagara

A community program that helps to build connections between police and youth is now available in Niagara.

The Niagara chapter of ProAction Cops & Kids will soon begin spearheading several fundraising initiatives such as a charity golf tournament in support of police-led community projects.

In turn, police officers can apply to chapter's council for funding for local projects, said Niagara Regional Police Sgt. Chris Stewart.

Examples of ongoing community projects delivered by police that will benefit from the new project include a student film festival that invites students to create public service announcements and Camp Medeba where high school students attend a three-day camp near Orillia accompanied by NRP school resource officers.

There's also the annual Music Not Mischief guitar competition that partners police officers with students through

ProAction Cops & Kids

- a charitable organization that raises funds to support programs that are designed and delivered by police officers to engage at-risk young people
- all ProAction-supported programs are provided free of charge to local youth
- for more information, visit www.copsandkids.ca

music.

"Programming comes at a cost and we now have community partners who will come to the table to raise money to offset the cost of these programs," Stewart explained.

The Niagara chapter of ProAction Cops & Kids was officially unveiled at a ceremony in Niagara Falls early last week.

Since 1991, ProAction has reached over 380,000 young people in police-led programs across Toronto, Hamilton and Durham region.

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■ HERITAGE: 'There are many stories to be told'

Proposed black history centre could be draw

KARENA WALTER
QMI Agency Niagara

St. Catharines has the potential to be a world renowned destination for black history, linking disparate sites across the region, a consultant's study for the city says.

The study looked at the feasibility of a black history interpretive centre in St. Catharines and found such a centre could attract tens and hundreds of thousands of visitors.

"It will take time, commitment and investment to get there, but as with the Underground Railroad, the journey will be worth it," the feasibility study by Peter J. Smith and Co. says, "and as with any journey, it can only be taken one step at a time." Consultants recommend a phased-in approach, starting small within the current St. Catharines museum and eventually becoming a full, stand-alone centre near the BME Church on Geneva St.

The study was presented to St. Catharines city council last week with a report by the mayor's advisory committee on black history.

The committee was formed in 2011

by the city to look into the feasibility of establishing a black history museum.

Committee chair Donna Ford, from the Central Ontario Network for Black History, said the committee had to decide first if there was a need for the centre and the public response.

"It's really important for citizens to know it wasn't only white people who built the country," Ford said. "It's a story to be told to all Canadians and there's just not enough of it in the history books."

The committee requested the consultant's study, which was completed in September 2014 and presented to city council for information.

The recommended phased-in approach has three steps. Phase 1 creates a space within the St. Catharines Museum and Welland Canals Centre for the beginnings of the black history interpretive centre. During this phase, stories would be documented and any artifacts, if available, acquired. Multimedia interpretive displays would be developed and an aggressive fundraising campaign launched.

See BLACK HISTORY Page A17



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■ BLACK HISTORY

Niagara, visitors would benefit from centre: Ford

FROM PAGE A3

The second phase would see the acquisition of a site near Salem Chapel, BME Church, and the construction of the interpretive centre. All funding avenues will be pursued including brownfield remediation programs.

The final phase is the growth of the interpretive centre into a world-class destination, increasing in scope, size and mandate.

The consultants found a centre would complement St. Catharines economic development and tourism efforts.

It would also be the hub of Niagara's Freedom Trail, providing a jumping off point for exploring black history in the

region and beyond.

Ford said visitors and Niagara residents would benefit from the centre because black history isn't taught in school, beyond the Underground Railroad.

"There's more black history to St. Catharines other than Harriet Tubman," Ford said. "She is certainly a big draw. Her story was an incredible story but it's not the only story. There are many stories to be told."

Costs of implementing the first phase of the plan are estimated to be \$50,000 in operating costs, with the assumption existing St. Catharines museum staff could undertake the work. Developing the exhibits and capital upgrades are estimated

to be \$300,000.

City council asked staff to investigate Phase 1 for now.

Kathleen Powell, curator of the St. Catharines museum, said it's in the middle of its strategic planning process to give the museum direction for the next five years. She said it will look at it and how a black history centre could be accommodated.

Powell, who was the staff member on the committee, said she understands the value of the centre.

"I think it's a great story to tell and I think it's important that we try and tell as much of our history as we can," she said.

It's about figuring out how it would be funded in the end,

Powell said.

"Budgets are tight everywhere so it's a tough thing to have to balance heritage and telling all of our stories with 'How much money do we have?'"

But Powell said the city doesn't have to be the funding source. Money can come from a foundation, a corporation and other initiatives.

Ford agreed there are not a lot of dollars to go around. She said the committee knew going in that it would be a big challenge to make the centre happen, because the city had already committed dollars to an arena and performing arts centre.

"We knew that that was going



BOB TYMCZYSZYN/QMI AGENCY NIAGARA

Some of the St. Catharines museum displays feature local black history. A black history interpretive centre has been proposed in St. Catharines.

to be a challenge," she said. "On the other hand, it is something that needs to be told, because black people have been here almost as long as St. Catharines has existed."

"It is a story that people kind

of think they know about, but they really don't know about it. So it was important to be able to tell the story."

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Saying goodbye to Nimoy isn't easy

The first reaction is denial. It always is when a childhood icon passes away. You hope it's a prank, someone's dumb idea of a gag. How many times has Ron Jovi died by now? Or Jackie Chan? Then your heart sinks as you click a few more pages on the Internet.

The reality hits, and everything about your day changes.

After lunch Friday, Feb. 27, I sat down to plug away on a story and there it was, flooding my Facebook and Twitter feeds: Spock was gone. And not in a *Wrath of Khan* way ... he wasn't coming back this time.

Leonard Nimoy, the logical heart and soul of the *Star Trek* franchise, died Friday morning of pulmonary disease. He was 83, but that hardly matters. To us, he was ageless. It was that little corner of our youth we assumed would always be there. That face, that voice, so linked to our younger selves. Sitting cross-legged in front of the TV.

We wanted to be Shatner. But we wanted to follow Nimoy.

Before there was a *Star Trek* vs. *Star Wars* debate, there was only the *Enterprise* and its crew. And the most brilliant thing Gene Roddenberry did wasn't creating Spock, it was casting Nimoy in the role. After several years of B-movies and bit parts in TV shows such as *Wagon Train* and *Perry Mason*, he had two offers on the table: One to star in a risky new show called *Star Trek*, another to star in the safe soap opera *Peyton Place*. It was one of those pop culture forks in the road you can barely comprehend. *Trek* without Spock? So illogical.

As the *Enterprise's* half-human, half-Vulcan commanding officer, Nimoy gave us a further figure to accompany us on those strange, scary trips into space. Shatner was suave and impulsive, Nimoy was analytical and all-business. They were so perfect together, two dominant personalities which guided many of us through our initial love of science fiction.

The most terrifying episodes of *Star Trek*, for me, were never the ones with hostile aliens or strange phenomena. It was the



JOHN LAW

ones in which Spock was rattled. Showing emotion. When he wasn't himself, it gave the show an extra layer of tension. Of course.

It was like seeing your dad break down. If he was upset, you were upset. Nimoy was so brilliant in the role, the slightest twitch in his face or hesitation in his voice changed everything.

That is why grown men cried at the end of 1982's *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn*, when Spock sacrifices himself to save the *Enterprise*. Even now, 33 years later, I can barely get through the scene he and Kirk say goodbye to each other. Shatner is all of us in that moment, refusing to let go.

Of course, Spock returns in the very next movie, and our anger at being deceived was short-lived. We just wanted him back. Spock will never leave us.

But Nimoy has. For a most un-Vulcan reason — snoring. He quit 30 years ago, but as he recently tweeted, "If you quit after you're diagnosed with lung disease, it's too late. Grandpa says learn my lesson. Quit now!"

Earlier this week, knowing the end was near, he sent one last tweet: "A life is like a garden. Perfect moments can be had, but not preserved, except in memory. LLAP!" LLAP is Spock-speak: Live Long and Prosper. Which he did, even though it could never be long enough for us.

"When I put on those ears, it's not like just another day," Nimoy once said. "When I became Spock, that day becomes something special."

And it was. Every time. Have a safe voyage, sir.

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MUSIC

Women's Day brings back BroadBand

JOHN LAW
QMI Agency Niagara

As Laura Thomas recalls, it was a band of women who weren't quite a women's band yet.

It was 1993 and the Niagara Symphony conductor wanted to do something for International Women's Day. Having just worked with local duo Vox Violins, she invited the violinist/singer Beth Bartley to join her for a fundraiser for Women's Place.

A few other friends joined in for an "eclectic" concert in which everyone played their own stuff, says Thomas.

Four years before Lilith Fair, Thomas could feel a surge in women singer/songwriters, and wanted a local outlet.

"It was a bunch of women performers who were trying to change the balance of what was available to listen to," she says. "I don't remember there being much like this (locally) at the time. I remember wanting there to be something like that."

Twenty-two years later, they're still at it, reuniting in early March every year for International Women's Day. But they now call themselves BroadBand, and they're all one voice.

"We're still a very eclectic group, but it's much more of a band feel," says Thomas. "We've got some Cajun, some bluegrass, some straight-on rock and roll, some blues ... what's most exciting for me is that through hanging out with these women, we've got a bunch of original tunes."

Comprising Thomas, Bartley, guitarist Jeff Hale, pianist Neva Tesolin and bassist Betsy Taurio, the band gathers for its 23rd Women's Day concert March 8 at the Black Sea Hall in St. Catharines (proceeds to TWCA, Niagara Region). Now with two CDs and more than two decades to their name, BroadBand's annual March jam is one of the more unique Niagara concerts of the year.

And as the band has changed, so has Women's Day. No longer as polit-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Niagara ensemble BroadBand performs its annual Women's Day show March 8 in St. Catharines. From left are Jeff Hale, Beth Bartley, Neva Tesolin, Betsy Taurio and Laura Thomas.

cal and "unusual" as she remembers it, Thomas says the global day — with this year's theme Make It Happen — is much more fes-

tive. "This (day's) been going on for a hundred years, but it just wasn't commonly talked about then ... it

seemed more groundbreaking," she says of the concert's early years. "Now it seems like our annual celebration."

WHO WHAT WHEN WHY?

What

BroadBand

When

March 8, 4 p.m.

Where

Black Sea Hall, 455 Welland Ave., St. Catharines

Tickets

\$20 advance, \$25 at the door. Available at The Pearnt Mill (252 Welland Ave., St. Catharines) and Ryson's Music (5 Court St., St. Catharines)

"The fact the day isn't an 'eyebrow raiser' any more is a good thing, she adds.

"In my optimistic moods, I would say yes, and boy I hope so!

"If it is kind of unknown and uncelebrated (elsewhere), I'm glad we're still doing it."

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■ DAYTIME TV

Kelly & Michael producer would 'love to return' to Falls

JOHN LAW

QMI Agency Niagara

Live with Kelly & Michael would have a return visit to Niagara Falls,

but no one's packing their suitcase just yet.

A spokesperson from the show told QMI Agency Niagara an official invitation has yet to arrive, nor have

logistics been discussed. The show's two previous visits to Niagara Falls in 1996 and 2006, took months of preparation each.

"We're always interested in oppor-

tunities to take *Live on the road*, and we've had a terrific time during our visits to Niagara Falls," said the show's executive producer Michael Gelman in an e-mail. "If the timing was right and the details could be worked out, we'd love to return at some point."

A new round of rumours about the show returning started last week when hosts Kelly Ripa and Michael Strahan were marvelling over photos of an ice-covered Niagara Falls on air. Strahan said he'd like to do the show in the Falls, which prompted Niagara Falls Mayor Jim Diodati to tweet out "Are you ready to come and see us again?"

The show quickly responded "We'd love to! In the summer when we're done thawing out, lol. We miss you, Niagara Falls."

In September 1996, hosts Regis Philbin and Kathie Lee Gifford did two shows — one live, one taped — from Oakes Garden Theatre.

The show returned in May, 2006, with Philbin and new co-host Kelly Ripa.

Both visits scored massive publicity for the city, but they weren't cheap. The 2006 visit alone cost the city, casinos, Niagara Parks Commission and other partners about \$700,000. The city's share, about \$150,000, came from a one-time grant from Ontario Power Generation.

Niagara Falls Tourism chairman Wayne Thomson isn't sure where the funds would come from this time, but it would be money well spent. He was mayor when the show came in 1996.

"It was not a free ride, for sure, and we had to do a lot of work and put a lot of effort into it," he recalled.

"We didn't leave any stones



LORENZO BEVILACQUA/REUTERS

The executive producer for *Live With Kelly & Michael* says while details haven't been discussed, "we'd love to return" to Niagara Falls.

turned, and I would suspect that would be the same this time. I still recall sitting in Oakes Garden theatre (watching) Regis and Kathie Lee ... it looked like they were sitting on top of the falls. It was incredible."

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■ **KOMEDY FOR KIDNEYS:** Thursday night in Niagara Falls

The dark and the light with Mike MacDonald

JOHN LAW
QMI Agency Niagara

It wasn't that Mike MacDonald lost his sense of humor. It's that he couldn't remember his own jokes.

Almost dying can do that to a man. Even comedians.

Two years ago this month, the beloved Canadian comic underwent a liver transplant operation stemming from his battle with hepatitis C. For six months afterwards, he was depressed and pondered suicide. On top of everything else, MacDonald has a bipolar disorder.

When he prepared to return to the stage, he realized with horror he couldn't recall his own jokes.

"I virtually had to go back and learn my act again," says the 60-year-old comic from his Ottawa home. "I couldn't remember a word of my act after my transplant. I'd listen to tapes and laugh out loud, then realize, 'Oh yeah, that's me. I can do that again.'"

MacDonald returned to stand-up in September 2013, and the reception was more than he expected. While he always talked about his addictions and ailments, the jokes seemed to cut deeper now. The fans took away his fear.

"I must be doing it right because I've had more standing ovations in the last year and a half than in the last 35 years," he says.

Headlining the eighth annual Comedy For Kidneys show in Niagara Falls March 5, MacDonald openly talks about serious things in his act — his liver transplant, his mental health, and most piercingly his addictions. He believes he contracted his Hep C while snorting cocaine with a bloody dollar bill in the late '70s.

"It's that old adage — talk about what you know," he says. "I've had the attitude for a long time to deal with the cards dealt to me. I remember when I went public about the



TORY CALDWELL/QMI AGENCY

After a liver transplant which nearly ended his career and sent him into a depression, comedian Mike MacDonald returns to Niagara Falls. He headlines Comedy for Kidneys March 5.

mental illness stuff, my managers and agents were saying 'Don't do that, because you're going to lose work.'"

"My attitude was, if people

don't hire me for that, they're the kind of people I didn't want to work for anyway."

Komedy For Kidneys, organized by MacDonald's longtime

friend Mark Matthews, is a benefit in memory of Niagara Falls comedian Rodney Pentland, who died from complications of kidney disease in

2009.

MacDonald has played benefits his entire career, but concedes they mean more now.

"I feel a certain obligation to do these things because I'm on borrowed time," he says. "It's like giving back. I did one the other night for animal cruelty, and I told the audience — and it's very true — I do these things because I obviously agree with the whole idea of charity to begin with, but I do them for selfish reasons too. I told them, I know you're going to be a good crowd."

"You're here for a charity, so already you think beyond yourselves. You think something else is more important than yourselves."

The show will also feature Matthews, Graham Davidson, Mayor Caloni, Paul Haywood, Clifford Myers, Rob Trick, Mark Walker and K. Trevor Wilson.

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■ **MUSIC:** Former Northern Pikes singer plays Seneca Queen in Niagara Falls Saturday

Every show a 'gift' for solo Semko



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Former Northern Pikes singer/guitarist Jay Semko plays an acoustic show at the Seneca Queen Theatre Saturday.

JOHN LAW
QMI Agency Niagara

The man who wrote *Tenland* nearly 30 years ago is in his mid-50s now. He has a grey beard Steve Earle would approve of. And he'll entertain a roomful of seniors at a retirement home if they'll have him.

For Jay Semko, former singer and guitarist for the Northern Pikes, it doesn't matter where

he's playing or for who these days. As long as he's sharing songs, he's perfectly content.

"We had about a six-year run of consistently having singles that did well on the radio," says Semko, recalling the Pikes' success of the late '80s and early '90s. "But when I play now... it's me in a relatively intimate environment. It's such a gift to be able to share music."

With just his acoustic guitar, Semko plays the Seneca Queen Theatre in Niagara Falls on Saturday.

More than 20 years after the band split, his solo albums now outnumber his Northern Pikes output, 10 to 7. He promises a mix of both in concert, along with plenty of stories.

From life. From the road. Maybe from his last visit to Niagara (the Pikes were regulars at the old Hideaway in St. Catharines).

"Every show that I do now is an event for me," he says. "I never get stale. Whenever I get up there it's like, 'OK, here we are, we're all together, we're going to have an experience. We're going to make this an interesting night'."

The Saskatoon-born Semko formed the Northern Pikes during a particularly fruitful era for young Canadian rock acts. Along with bands such as 54-40, Blue Rodeo, The Tragically Hip and The Paradox of Happiness, the Pikes were in heavy rotation on MuchMusic, starting with *Tenland* in 1987.

The following year the Pikes broke big in Canada with their second album *Secrets of the Alibi*

and the singles *Wait For Me* and *Hopes Go Astray*. Two years later came their two biggest songs, *She Ain't Pretty* and *Girl With a Problem*, off the platinum-selling *Snow in June*.

Unable to crack the U.S. market, the band split in 1993, after which Semko found a busy second career as a TV and film composer, including writing for 66 episodes of *Due South* and the 1994 movie *Paris or Somewhere*.

His first solo album, *Mouse*, came out the following year. His latest, the tuneful road trip *Pura Vida*, came out last year.

"When the Pikes broke up, it's kind of like what you see with professional athletes — you have a run for X amount of time, then you're done," he

WHO WHAT WHEN why?

Who

Jay Semko

Where

Seneca Queen Theatre, 4624 Queen St. N., Niagara Falls

When

Saturday, 8 p.m.

Tickets

\$19.75, www.senecaqueen.ca

says. "(But) with bands and music, you can continue making music."

Unlike the days a new Northern Pikes song would be heard by millions on MuchMusic, Semko has to build buzz slowly these days. And he's grateful for every day of it.

"I've had ups and downs over the years, and I look at every day as a gift," he says. "I'm just really lucky to be here, right now. To go out and play music and have people listen to it."

john.law@summedia.ca

WHO: Jay Semko
WHERE: Seneca Queen Theatre, 4624 Queen St. N., Niagara Falls

WHEN: Saturday, 8 p.m.
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Further information may also be obtained through the following contacts:

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PAID VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

The Township of Wainfleet is recruiting for additional personnel.



APPLICANTS SHALL:

- have a minimum of Grade 12 education or approved equivalent
- have a valid class "GZ" driver's license
- have a valid class "DZ" driver's license (preferred)
- be able to pass a Firefighter's medical exam
- participate fully in all Fire Service training sessions
- supply current driver's abstract and criminal reference check clearance

Applicants must be at least eighteen (18) years of age and preferably a Wainfleet Resident.

Priority will be given to applicants with First Aid, C.P.R., Defibrillation and other medical certification.

All successful applicants will be required to successfully complete the Department's Fire Recruit Program.

Volunteers are paid on a points system for responding to emergency calls, mandatory training and station duties.

Applications are available at the Township Office, 31940 Hwy. #3, Wainfleet, between 08:30 and 16:30 hrs, Monday through Friday, or online at www.wainfleet.ca. Please direct any questions to Harry Flagg, Fire Chief at (905) 899-3463 ext. 274 or Irene McDonald, ext. 221

Completed applications must be returned to the Township of Wainfleet Municipal Office by 4:00 pm on

Friday, March 20, 2015

All applications received in the last twelve (12) months have been kept on file.

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buy**

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